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SUBJECT: CONTINUING TO REACH OUT TO THE SUNNIS: DEMOCRACY  
IS THE ANSWER

REF: BAGHDAD 0071

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a follow-up meeting on January 30, 2006, the Ambassador met with Sheikh Khamis Hawaz al-Sidiq, a former Iraqi Army Major General from Hillah and senior Shammar tribal figure. Sidiq criticized the US for depending on expatriate Iraqis when it launched the war, and he defended the resistance as legitimate. He also bitterly criticized the Kurds for causing problems with the Arabs in northern Iraq. The Ambassador underlined that democracy was the way to address the problems facing Iraq. Sheikh Sidiq ended the meeting by indicating that he would cooperate and support non-violence. We received word of his arrest on early February 6 - a development that will not encourage like-minded tribalists to trust the government. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Sidiq began forcefully by complaining that the United States had planted sectarianism and had not come to the Iraqis who could make decisions. According to Sidiq, those Iraqis that came in from abroad, such as Hakim and Jafari, do not care for Iraq and want to divide it. He said that he loved Americans, but not those here with guns. Sidiq claimed that resistance is a legitimate right - "how can we accept that Iraq be divided by federalism? We will not allow Iraq to be divided." Sidiq claimed he had 600,000 fighters under his orders, but was only using 20,000 now. "Funny that you are fighting in the sands. We will tire you, wear you out. The solution is fixing mistakes. We are one country."

¶3. (C) Sidiq then spoke of his view of the Kurdish problem. He said, "The problem is between the Kurds and the Arabs. Let the Arabs reach an understanding amongst themselves. Kurds have a state, an army, and ministers. They are stable. While the Kurds exist, we will not resolve the problems."

¶4. (C) The Ambassador explained in detail that the best way to address these problems is through democracy and by respecting each others' views. He stated that the answer is not to have one group take over and tell the others what to do but to get those who do not participate to participate. All Iraqis could be well off if Iraqi is successful, and one day Iraqis should see each other for what they can do, not what religion they believe in.

¶5. (C) Despite his complaints, Sidiq ended the meeting by acknowledging that the political process offered opportunities; he even said he would join the government if asked (Comment: likely one of the reasons for his visit. End Comment.) He added that, of the current prime minister candidates, he supports Jabiri, but he cautioned that the United States should listen carefully and sift through the candidates' words. As he finished he said, "We will put down our arms."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: We have never heard of Sheikh Sidiq as a powerful force in the resistance, although it is easy to believe that he would know tribal kinsmen involved in insurgent activities. This conversation shifted from bellicose to conciliatory by the end of the meeting. Sheikh Sidiq was likely uncertain as to what course to follow - reject the formation of new government or join the process - when he arrived for the meeting and therefore chose an aggressive approach at first. By the end of the meeting, he appeared to be convinced by the Ambassador's argument and to buy into the Iraqi political process, leaving the meeting in an upbeat mood. This is representative of many of the Sunni rejectionists who still need to be convinced that becoming part of the political process is in their best interests. We received word of Sidiq's arrest on early February 6 - a development that will not encourage like-minded tribalists to trust the government. (NOTE: He will be released later on February 6. END NOTE.). END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) Biographic information: Sheikh Khamis Hawaz al-Sidiq claims to be the head of the Shamar tribe with four million Iraqis under him. He stated that he is 67 years old and has been in politics for the last 50 years, dating back to the time of Gamal Abdel Nasser. His son Mohammad accompanied him to the meeting.

KHALILZAD